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WITNESS my hand this
Twenty-sixth day of October 2000

Lisa Treverrow

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TEAM LEADER EXAMINATION
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AUSTRALIA

PATENTS ACT 1990

PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION

Invention Title:

Multiple venue jackpot system

Aristocrat Leisure Industries

The invention is described in the following statement:

Multiple venue jackpot system

Introduction

The present invention relates generally to the provision of jackpots on networked gaming machines and in particular the invention provides a method of awarding a jackpot from a prize pool operated across a plurality of venues.

Background of the Invention

It has become desirable in the past to link gaming machines together into a network of machines for a variety of reasons including, gathering of accounting information and payment of system wide jackpots. In particular, the payment of system wide jackpots has become popular because it increases the size of prizes that can be offered by a gaming machine operator, by allowing the accumulation of a large jackpot pool from which prizes are paid on the basis of a random trigger or some other selection mechanism. Such systems are sometimes operated over a number of venues, but in order to inter connect the venues securely, expensive infrastructure is required.

Unfortunately, such jackpot systems, known as linked systems, have previously only been available to large establishments operating enough machines to enable the collection of a large prize pool in a reasonable period of time, or alternatively groups of establishments having sufficient turnover to be able to justify the expense of the infrastructure required to link multiple sites.

Summary of the Invention

According to a first aspect the present invention provides a jackpot system for providing jackpots on electronic gaming machines operating in a plurality of EGM venues, each EGM venue having a networked electronic gaming machine (EGM) installation including one or more electronic gaming machines (EGMs) connected via communications network to a network controller, jackpot awarding means arranged to award jackpot prizes to individual EGMs based on a predetermined trigger condition being established, and reporting means arranged to report gaming activity and jackpot events to a master controller located remotely from the respective EGM venue, the EGM installation in each EGM venue maintaining a prize pool from which jackpot prizes are awarded, the prize pool being periodically updated in response to pool information communicated from the master controller to the respective EGM installation.

According to a second aspect the present invention provides a jackpot system for providing jackpots on electronic gaming machines operating in an EGM venue, the EGM venue having a networked electronic gaming machine (EGM) installation including one or more electronic gaming machines (EGMs) connected via communications network to a network controller, jackpot awarding means arranged to award jackpot prizes to individual EGMs based on a predetermined trigger condition being established, and communications means arranged to report gaming activity and jackpot events to a master controller located remotely from the respective EGM venue, the EGM installation maintaining a prize pool from which jackpot prizes are awarded, the prize pool being periodically updated in response to pool information provide to the EGM installation from the master controller via the communications means to the EGM installation provided via the communications means from the master controller.

According to a third aspect the present invention provides a master controller for a jackpot system for providing jackpots on electronic gaming machines operating in a plurality of EGM venues, each EGM venue having a networked electronic gaming machine (EGM) installation including one or more electronic gaming machines (EGMs) connected via communications network to a network controller, jackpot awarding means arranged to award jackpot prizes to individual EGMs based on a predetermined trigger condition being established, and reporting means arranged to report gaming activity and jackpot events to the master controller, the master controller being located remotely from at least one of the EGM venues, the EGM installation in each EGM venue maintaining a prize pool from which jackpot prizes are awarded, master controller collecting game statistics from each venue and periodically communicating information to update the prize pool of each EGM installation.

In one embodiment of the invention, the EGM installation in each EGM venue includes a local jackpot controller and a front-end processor, such that the jackpot controller monitors electronic gaming machine operation, determines the occurrence of jackpot trigger condition, maintains the prize pool information, and awards prizes from the prize pool when trigger condition occurs.

Preferably, the front-end processor monitors the operation of local jackpot controller, the electronic gaming machines in the network and gathers statistics for forwarding to the master controller. The front-end processor

preferably communicates with the master controller via e-mail or a similar communications carrier. However, as the system does not rely on a real-time response, communication can be via any method including paper reports, tape, floppy disk or other magnetic media, or a variety of other secure communication techniques. For added security, communication between EGM venues and the master controller may also be encrypted.

The front-end processor also preferably communicates with a security system to indicate EGMs on which jackpot has been won, in order that the security system may direct the field of view of security video cameras to the area of the winning machine.

The master controller includes an accounting system for gathering accounting information from each of the venues participating in the multiple venue jackpot system, and means for calculating jackpot pool for each venue based on gaming machine activity at the respective venues as reported by the respective front-end processors. The master controller also includes communication means for receiving communications from the front-end processors at each EGM venue and returning prize pool information to each venue.

Brief description of the Drawing

An embodiment of the invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating a Multiple venue jackpot system according to the present invention.

Detailed Description of a Preferred Embodiment

Referring to Figure 1, an embodiment of the invention is illustrated, in which a Dacom™ computer system is arranged as a master controller of a multi-venue jackpot system. The master controller is arranged to provide information to help participating venues monitor and optimise slot machine performance and generate statutory reports required by licensing bodies.

The master controller is arranged to collect and manage slot machine operations and management information for a casino or other gaming venue. Day to day operating details can be collected, recorded, updated and summarised automatically by the master controller.

Traditionally controllers of this type have been connected to electronic gaming machines through a physical network of wires. The controller would communicate with a gaming machine through a simple router (FEP) with serial

lines. However, using current technology this model can be extended to a more complex multi venue network where the multiple venues and the master controller communicate by indirect means such as email (via an ISP) or even by media transfer (CD rom, etc). Of course, communication can also be via traditional Wide Area Networking techniques.

In the embodiment illustrated in Figure 1, the master controller 10 is arranged to control a bank of slot machines (EGMs) 11 grouped to a local jackpot controller 12. This control is applied through the use of a simple ISP 13 e-mail facility.

The Front-End Processor (NT-FEP) is an application running on a PC 14, the application having the following features:

- It maintains a live connection to the gaming floor network of up to several hundreds of slave nodes. Slave node consists of an EGM 11 & Machine Communication Interface (MCI) pair and from a network point of view this pair of devices is treated as a single entity.
- Connection of one or more clients over a LAN is supported. Clients may issue request(s) and wait for responses. Significant events are also sent to all clients connected at the time.
- It sends significant security events to the on-site security system controller 15 which activates and directs security cameras 17 to the area of the significant security event.

The Progressive Jackpot Front End Processor (PJFEP) is an application also running on the PC 14 with the following features:

- It maintains a connection to the Local Jackpot Controller 12.
- Connection of one or more clients over LAN is supported. Clients may issue request(s) and wait for responses.

There are several clients running on the same computer system 14 where NT-FEP and PJFEP are running. The most important client is Progressive Jackpot Client (PJClient) with the following features:

- It maintains a connection to the NTFEP and PJFEP applications.
- All significant event messages that are generated by the PJClient are stored in digital media.
- It performs snapshot of the NTFEP and PJFEP when significant events (eg Jackpot Hit) and data (eg EGM Turnover, Jackpot Level Value) are retrieved. Appropriate log files are created to store these events.
- Snapshot time is user configurable.

- Configuration of the PJClient (eg TCP/IP address, snapshot time) can be saved.

The NTFEP and PJFEP servers use a transport layer protocol to connect to PJClient. The NTFEP acts as a server and PJClient establishes its connection. On every snapshot, the PJClient retrieves the current turnover value of all online EGMs 11. These will be recorded onto the log file. If required, the significant security events could be included in these log files as well.

On every snapshot, the PJClient also checks if the Jackpot Controller 12 is still online. If it is, PJClient proceeds to get a snapshot of the current jackpot level value as well as the jackpot hit events that have occurred since the last snapshot. These will be recorded onto the log file as well.

There is another client which at the snapshot time attaches different log files produced by the PJClient for that snapshot time to an email and sends it to the ISP mail server 13.

On the other side, the master controller 10 can use an e-mail client to retrieve the e-mails sent from the site and incorporate the data into appropriate fields of the database for later reports. These information will be recorded in the internal audit trail 16 of the master controller system 10.

It is possible for the master controller system 10 to send an e-mail to every site with the group and jackpot configurations for the jackpot controller of that site.

Glossary

EGM	Electronic Gaming Machine
ISP	Internet Service Provider
MCI	Machine Communication Interface
NT-FEP	Front End Processor
PJFEP	Progressive Jackpot Front End Processor

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

DATED this twenty-ninth day of September 1999

ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES
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Patent Attorneys for the Applicant:

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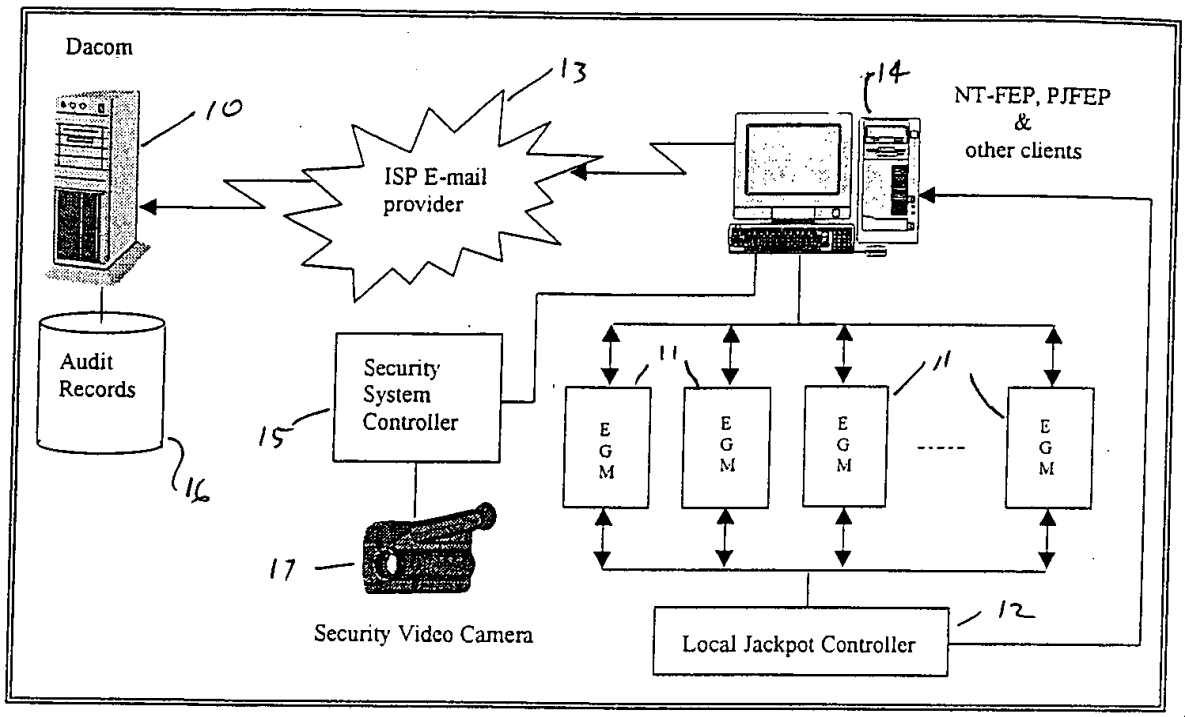
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